

### **IN404.13 Indiana NRCS Quality Assurance Plan**

#### **(1) Introduction**

i. The purpose of quality assurance activities in Indiana is to ensure delivery of consistent, professional, and quality products and services to our customers. Technical assistance is the backbone of our partnership. It is of the utmost importance that all employees maintain a high level of quality work. Quality assurance is the responsibility of all employees at every level of the organization. In Indiana, the first level of review is at the local level by the District Conservationist. Quality assurance is a continuous process that is achieved through both formal and informal quality assurance activities and continuous improvement. Continuous improvement activities include such things as training identification, delivery of specific training needs, follow-up, policy interpretation and clarification, recognition of quality work, and free flowing communication by all levels of the partnership.

ii. The “Indiana Quality Assurance Guide” outlines the formal activities that will be used to ensure the quality of conservation work performed by the Conservation Partnership. Two formal evaluations will be used. Annual Quality Reviews will be conducted for each field office to assess the quality of conservation planning and installation of conservation practices. Program Quality Reviews will be conducted in each area to assess the overall program delivery on a five-year basis.

#### **(2) Regular Field Visits**

i Regular field visits by the Area Conservationist or their designee, may consist of reviews completed during a field visit, at an area meeting, as part of an annual quality assurance review, program reviews, performance reviews, or on any annual basis depending on specific policy.

ii The Area Conservationist will review administrative activities detailed in the “Indiana Quality Assurance Guide” Section II – Operations Management, Section V – Administration, Section VI – Information, Section VII – Relations, and Section VIII – Civil Rights

#### **(3) Annual Quality Reviews**

i. Annual quality reviews will be conducted in each field office service area on a fiscal year basis. Quality will be assessed through a 5% analysis of conservation systems planned and applied. The 5% to be checked will be selected by the reviewer prior to the review. More than 5% may be checked at the discretion of the reviewer. It will not be necessary to check more than three to five systems or practices even if

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more would be required by literal application of the 5% rule. The work of each person (includes Conservation Partnership employees or Technical Service Providers) providing conservation technical assistance shall be checked during the annual reviews within a three year period. The annual reviews will include assessment of all systems including:

- Conservation Planning
- Cultural or management practices in the system, i.e. agronomic or biological, etc.
- Engineering or physical practices in the system.

ii. In addition to the annual analysis of conservation systems, other quality assurance activities will be carried out on a conservation program basis as required.

**(4) Program Quality Reviews**

i. The Program Quality Review will be a comprehensive review conducted on an Area basis to assess compliance with policy, regulation, program management, technical quality, service delivery and implementation of key strategic issues. Civil Rights Compliance, including outreach, reviews will be conducted to assess compliance and evaluate and monitor progress in program delivery and for continuous compliance with nondiscrimination regulations (230 GM, Part 405). Program Quality Reviews will be conducted in all counties in each area once every five years, and each Area Office will be reviewed once every four years.

**(5) Responsibility**

i. Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) are responsible for quality assurance activities and will work with the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), Division of Soil Conservation (DSC) Assistant Directors and the individual Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Supervisors, as appropriate, to ensure quality assurance activities are carried out, including both the annual and program reviews. Quality assurance of the MLRA/Soil Survey program will be conducted annually at the direction of the MLRA Office Leader/State Soil Scientist.

**(6) Implementation**

i. The Area Conservationist will provide leadership in the implementation of quality assurance activities and will consult with appropriate Assistant Director(s) of ISDA, DSC, and the District Supervisors of the individual SWCD. Program review teams will consist of the Area Conservationist, Resource Management Specialist, Area Engineer,

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Programs staff specialists, Technology staff specialists, and others as appropriate. Annual reviews will include engineering, agronomy and planning. Leadership for all reviews will be the responsibility of the Area Conservationist.

**(7) Timing**

- i. The Area Conservationist will develop a schedule for conducting Quality reviews by October 1 of each year and furnish it to the State Conservationist and appropriate Leadership Team members.
- ii. Annual quality reviews will be carried out on fiscal year basis. Annual quality analyses checklists will be compiled for each field office service area and given to the District Conservationist and Area Conservationist immediately following completion of the review. The checklist will include a section of corrective actions and completion dates. The Area Conservationist will submit tracking report to the State Conservationist with copies to the appropriate Leadership Team members on a quarterly basis.
- iii. Program Quality reviews will be conducted in each area annually covering a minimum of two USDA service centers per Technical Services Team coverage area with a minimum of four field offices per area. There will be an exit review held at the end of each program review detailing the findings and the commendations and recommendations for improvement. Corrective actions and completion dates will be documented at this time.
- iv. A Program Quality Review will be conducted in one area office annually. Where feasible this review will be coordinated with field office reviews. There will be an exit review held at the end of each program review detailing the findings and the commendations and recommendations for improvement. Corrective actions and completion dates will be documented at this time.

**(8) Summary Reports**

- i. The ASTC-FO will provide quarterly reports to the State Conservationist on the progress with tracking and program review summaries.
- ii. There will be an annual overview meeting that will detail the findings from the past fiscal year annual and program quality assurance reviews. The following shall participate in this meeting: State Conservationist, Area Conservationist, ASTC-Programs, ASTC-Operations, State Administrative Officer, State Soil Scientist, State Conservation Engineer, State Resource Conservationist, Area Engineers, Area Resource Management Specialists, and ISDA representatives.

**(9) Corrective Actions**

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i. The Area Conservationist will be responsible to ensure all corrective actions have been taken and documented. If deficiencies are discovered, a written report from the Area Conservationist will be provided to the appropriate District Conservationist detailing corrective actions needed and completion dates. At the direction of the Area Conservationist, the District Conservationist will prepare follow-up reports detailing the progress of all corrective actions. The ASTC-FO will inform the Conservation Partners of deficiencies within 30 days of the quality review so that corrective actions can be initiated in a timely fashion.

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ii. The Area Conservationist will make recommendations for corrective action to the STC. Corrective actions may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- Implementing remedial work, if requested by the landowner, using NRCS funds or any other funds that may be available.
- Additional training of employees.
- Adverse action against the employee.

iii. If the deficiency is the fault of a Conservation Partner employee, the Area Conservationist will consult with the appropriate partner and then make recommendations for corrective actions to the STC, the Director, Division of Soil Conservation, and/or SWCD Chairman as appropriate. Corrective actions may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- Implementing remedial work, if requested by the landowner using ISDA, DSC or SWCD funds as may be available.
- Additional training of employees.
- Progressive discipline.
- Adverse action against the employee.

**(10) Remedial Action**

i. Remedial action is a process to correct a functional problem of a conservation practice installed with the assistance of an NRCS employee or by an individual under the technical supervision of an NRCS employee. Financial aid under remedial action may only be used to correct a practice so it functions as intended. Remedial action funds may not be used to pay for damages resulting from a deficient practice. For more direction on remedial actions please refer to Problems and Deficiencies Subpart A, Part 504, IN210-V-NEM.

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